

## In memorium -- Al Davis and Brian Duke

All he really had was a Japanese flag that he found in an Okinawa cave after the island was captured during World War II.

But that flag, which is now on display at the Camp Roberts Museum, prompted Al Davis to begin a historical repository at the now dormant World War II recruit training camp. Through his efforts the history of the camp that saw in excess of 400,000 men pass through during the war, and even more during the Korean war, has been preserved and is now safely in the hands of enthusiastic docents.

Al Davis died earlier this year, but his touch lingers on.

"He started this museum, I believe, in 1985," said docent Joan Hussey. "He worked here on the post and he was always a historian. He decided he wanted to start a museum here. So he started out with very little, probably just a few photographs."

Davis started his project in a smaller building. For the first five or six years Davis worked on the project by himself. Then the base's environmentalist, Brian Duke, joined up followed by Frenchie Amundson who died in 1997. At the same time, Hussey came on board and joined the team.

Actually there are two museums at Camp Roberts, the main one in the old Red Cross Building which houses photographs, uniforms, books, rifles, and individual gear, and then there is the annex which is where the tanks and other heavy



**Al Davis was instrumental in the creation of the Camp Roberts Museum. His passing has left a large gap in the growth of the museum but volunteers are coming forward to pick up where he left off.**

equipment are on display including items belonging to a German army reenactment group.

The annex is located just down from the main gate. When the road splits left and right, turn right and you will pass the annex, which is

open by appointment only, and keep going until you see a Russian T-34 tank on cut in a bank, the museum is below it and to the right.

"This was actually the Red Cross building during World War II and Korea. The Red Cross came in and built it, the military did not build it," Hussey explained. "After that it was used for different generals and visitors to the post."

In addition to having World War II and Korean war displays, they also have some items from World War I including a shrine to Private Harold Roberts who was killed in the Great War to End All Wars.

"We do have a little bit of his stuff (his Medal of Honor as well as other awards he received plus a oil painting of him), but most of it is World War II stuff," said Hussey. "A lot of it is just of Camp Roberts. That's why Mr. Davis started this (museum) just for Camp Roberts."

Hussey said the museum is continuing to look for items it can display and they never turn down donations. "We try not too," she remarked. "We have tons and tons of uniforms which we would rather not have more off."

"Mr. Davis' philosophy was take anything and everything but its gotten to the point where we have so much stuff we kind of have to look it over and check it out."

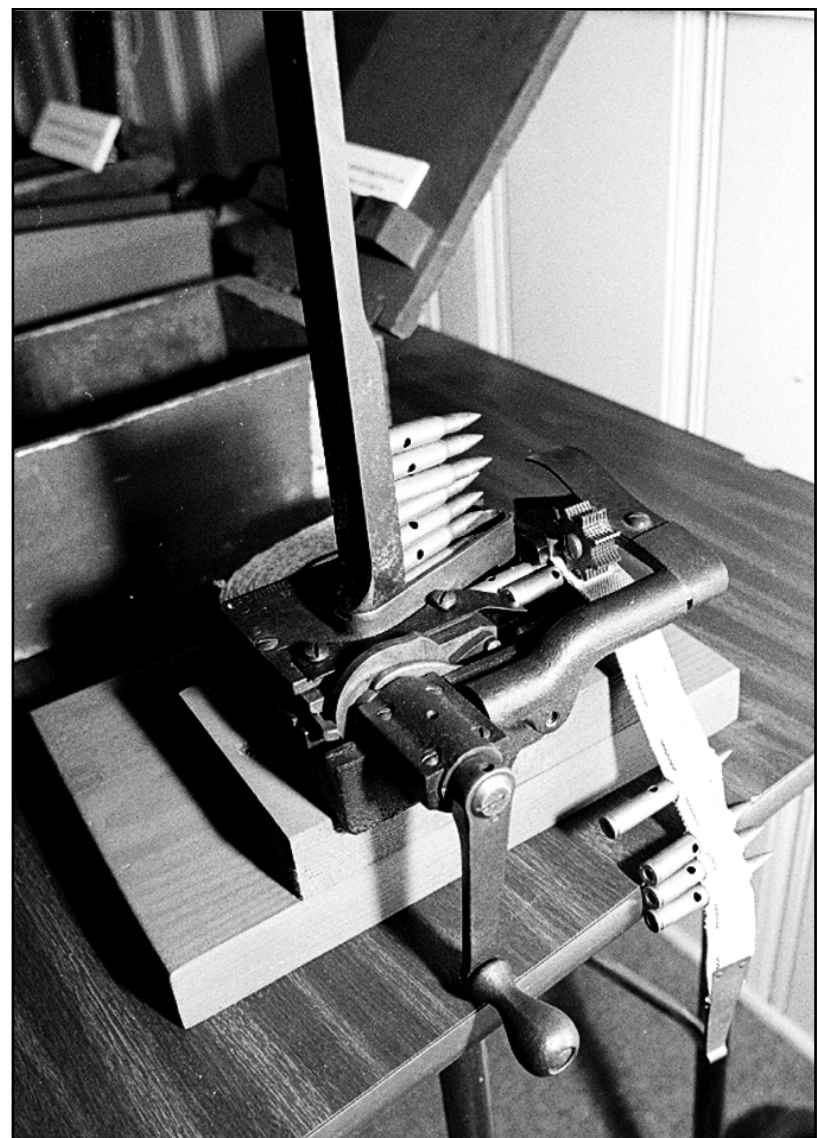
Hussey said the museum would like to expand, if it could, but "it's very difficult right now because we don't have that many volunteers, but we keep trying. We've got a lot of



**Brian Duke, who assisted Al Davis in building up the museum, passed away a month after Davis died. Within a short period, two of the key individuals in building up the history of the camp, were gone.**

advertisements going to get more volunteers but at this time we're open just two days a week. We'd like to get it so that we're open a couple more (days)."

The museum and its gift shop are open on Thursday and Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tours of the annex are by appointment only.



**If you have ever seen "Guadalcanal Diary" you will recall seeing the Marines loading machine gun ammunition into cloth belts using a strange looking machine. The scene was real as was the hand-cranked loader, one of which is on display at the Camp Roberts Museum.**

## San Miguel -- a sleepy community until there's a war

Anyone driving through San Miguel today would probably think it just a sleepy, rural farming town. Not much going on and people liking it that way.

Yet San Miguel, admittedly a cow town before and slightly after the turn of the 19th Century, was also a boom town. Not once, but twice.

During World War II, San Miguel became the recreation site for men processing through the newly built Camp Roberts. Although the property for the camp had been acquired years earlier, nothing was done with it until it was needed to send men to fight in the war.

And here was the sleepy little community just down the road. Quickly the town filled up with bars, cafes, movie theaters and, yep, it even had one of those places.

After the war San Miguel went back to sleep, sort of. Camp Roberts, as huge as it is, became a backwater military camp — there but mostly forgotten.

Until North Korea invaded South Korea.

Joan Hussey, a docent at the Camp Roberts museum, doesn't remember much of what San Miguel was like during World War II, but as a teenager in the 50's, the view of the community was up close and personnel.

A native of San Miguel, and a returned resident of 31 years, she worked in the movie theater while Camp Roberts bustled with activity, recycling reservists called up to fight in Korea.

"It was very, very big. There

were thousands of soldiers out here," she recalled, "who came to town to do what they liked to do. We did have the two theaters at that time. There was one on the corner of 11th Street and they built a much larger theater, the Graybill, on the same block, I'm not exactly sure when but it was during Korea."

She said that the Graybill Theater is still in existence but you can no longer see it as the front has been turned into a restaurant. "What is in the theater I don't know but I understand there is a lot of junk in there."

Bars? "Of course. Liquor stores, clothing stores, whatever a soldier needed they had it. You could have patches sewed on. Many restaurants, many of them still sitting there that are all closed up. A little Greek gentleman and his family had a soda fountain and a barber shop there. It was just very bustling," said Hussey.

"The (Greyhound) busses would stop there all the time to pick up the soldiers and take them to Paso or to bring them back to Camp Roberts. I assume the Army had busses too."

With the distance to the camp well within walking distance, and who better to walk long distances in short order than a soldier, there was a lot of foot traffic to the town and back before reveille in the morning.

And San Miguel even had its own "Red Light" area for the boys in olive drab.

"Definitely," said Hussey on the ladies of the evening. "I couldn't tell you exactly where. As a teenager I didn't know that but, I don't know if it was during World War II or Korea, they had what they called the Cotton



**Joan Hussey, docent.**

Club that was just for black soldiers."

Asked if the old hotel or motel on the other side the tracks, long closed up and now overgrown by vines, was one of the red light houses, Hussey said she thought it was but she wasn't sure. "I understand that was a red light spot but that's just what I've heard."

"When I graduated from high school it was open (for boarders)," she said on what was rumored to be a house of ill repute. "That was in

1953 and, of course, that was after Korea. I wasn't doing too well with my family here in San Miguel so I had a room at her place, which was very nice at the time. I don't know what it was like during the war."

Asked if the site was busy during the war, Hussey said "I'm sure it was but not after the war. "I think she rented out to people who stayed month after month (probably to soldier's wives)."

Apparently brawls weren't unusual since the Sheriff's Office had a deputy stationed in the town.

"I'm sure there was. How could you have that many soldiers and not (have fights). The one jail that I know of is now the town library. I think that was built in World War II and they used that during Korea also. Now it's the library."

How is San Miguel affected by it's huge neighbor today?

The economic benefit from not only the soldiers who work on the installation and live with their families in nearby San Miguel, but from money spent in the community by the transient soldiers training for a

weekend or a couple weeks at a time.

And there is community spirit. Whether it's a parade or festival or the elementary school needing support, Camp Roberts is there offering use of the gymnasium, ball fields or roadways for school athletic functions or marathons. Camo netting is often requested to provide shade at parades and festivals. The museum is also a popular educational tool and field trip location (military history, local history as well as natural history).

## New emergency response plans



**A new Pierce Hawk Wildland fire engine has been delivered to the base. It is designed to be a "first-strike" rapid response vehicle to fires at the base and the surrounding area including San Miguel.**

By Lisa Cooksey  
Photo by Staff Sgt. Tom Murotake, Camp Roberts Public Affairs Office

Camp Roberts Emergency Services Department is a well trained, year-round organization that supports military units and civilian organizations training on post as well as the surrounding community.

In addition to handling the unique fire-fighting challenges of a multi-use military installation, Camp Roberts Emergency Services also respond to emergencies in the surrounding communities and highways.

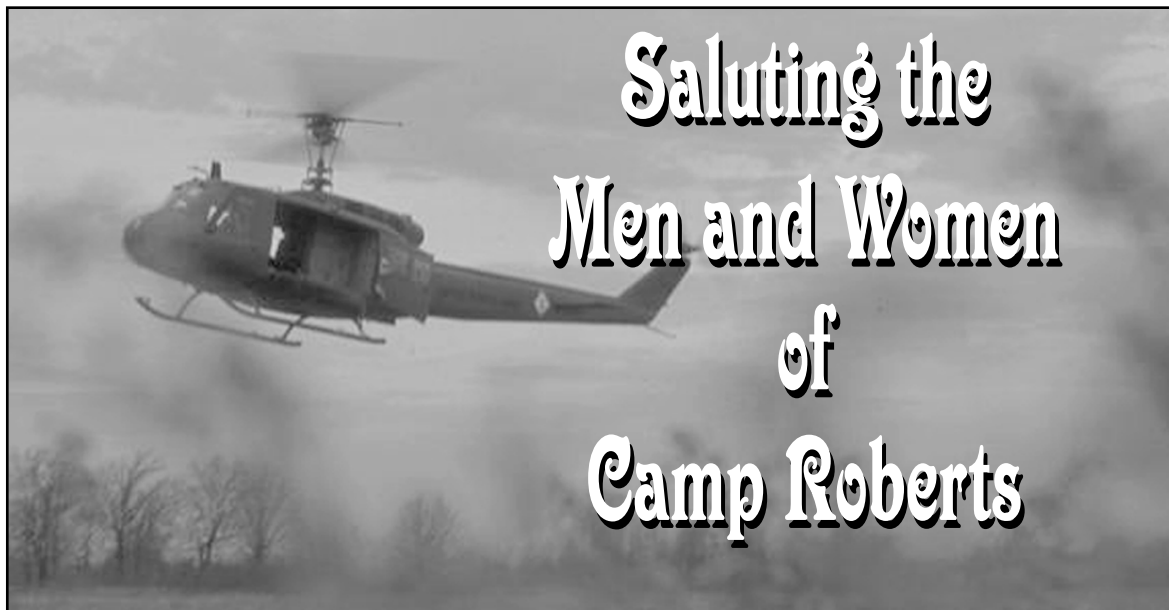
Emergency Services responded to 434 calls last year, including 209 calls in the surrounding communities under "automatic-aid" agreements with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF)/San Luis Obispo County Fire Department and the Monterey County Fire Department.

Camp Roberts has taken delivery of a new Pierce Hawk Wildland fire engine, the first new fire engine for the post in more than a decade. Specifically designed for "first-strike" rapid responses for both range fires and fires in newly developing areas, this four-wheel-drive, rough-terrain fire truck can provide

emergency response to areas that are difficult or impossible to reach with conventional fire trucks.

The truck carries up to 500-gallons of water and can pump up to 1,000 gallons per minute. With additional rescue equipment added to some of the special roll-up door compartments, the truck is able to respond to a wide-variety of emergencies.

After a recent response to a fire in San Bernardino, the San Bernardino County Fire Department contacted the engine's manufacturer with plans to order twenty trucks based on the Camp Roberts engine's pattern.



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